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NEWS RELEASE

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November 29, 2004

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Focus on forest plan revision: noxious weeds

Note: This is the fourth in a six-part series. The first five articles will feature each of the five proposed revision topics. The sixth article will provide information about the comment process.

Kamiah – Spotted knapweed. Yellow starthistle. Leafy spurge. Do you know what this group of plants has in common? All are unwanted “invaders” that are exploding across forests and grasslands in north-central Idaho.

According to Clearwater National Forest Supervisor Larry Dawson and Acting Nez Perce National Forest Supervisor Steve Williams, these are only three of the noxious weed species crowding out native vegetation on the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests. And they are causing significant ecological changes.

Noxious weeds are designated by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. To be designated “noxious” a plant must be present in, but not native to Idaho. It must also be potentially harmful to the state.

Thirty-six weed species have been designated as “noxious” in the state of Idaho; 16 of those are known to occur on one or both of the two national forests.

“We are very concerned about the trend of increasing weed populations on the two national forests,” Dawson and Williams said in a joint statement. “Once an invasive species is established it is very difficult to eradicate.”

The Idaho Department of Agriculture estimates weeds cost the state millions of dollars by: (1) degrading habitat; (2) clogging streams and waterways; (3) crowding out beneficial plants; (4) creating fire hazards; (5) poisoning and injuring livestock and humans; and (6) tainting recreation sites.

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It is estimated nearly 1.4 million acres of the four million acres that comprise the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests are “at-risk” for invasion by noxious weeds.

Existing forest plans contain limited direction regarding management of noxious weeds. According to Dawson and Williams, forests can no longer ignore the rapid rate of weed expansion, particularly along roads and trails.

To address the problem, the forests propose to update plans by incorporating the Salmon River, Clearwater River and Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness weed management area strategies. These strategies were developed cooperatively by federal, state and county governments as well as private landowners. They include comprehensive approaches to weed management that are designed to reduce and contain existing weed populations and eradicate new infestations.

In addition Dawson and Williams propose to include goals, objectives and standards that address prevention and education as well as guidance to contain and/or control weed populations.

Finally forest plans will address the need to restore native plants to areas where they have been replaced by noxious weeds.

Individuals interested in learning more about the forests’ proposal for managing weeds are encouraged to read the proposed action and notice of intent to revise forest plans. Both are available at local Forest Service offices and on the internet at www.fs.fed.us/cnpz.

Public comments are appreciated and will be accepted through December 31, 2004.

Additional information regarding Idaho’s noxious weed problem is available at the Department of Agriculture’s website, www.agri.state.id.us/animal/weedintro.htm.

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